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# WOMEN IN MODERN PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN AMERICA

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WOMEN IN MODERN PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC  
RELATIONS IN AMERICA

An Essay Submitted to the  
Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences of John Carroll University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

By  
Jayah J. Watters  
2019

## Abstract

The profession of public relations is defined as a “strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, n.d., para. 5). The profession was founded by men to refute criticism of big businesses during the rise of muckrakers known today as investigative journalists. Ivy Lee who wrote the first press release and Edward Bernays who developed the first press kit were significant influences in establishing the profession of modern public relations (Rise of the Image Men, 2019). Additionally the founding involved significant moments such as establishment of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during World War I and propaganda. Since then public relations has transitioned significantly to an industry largely comprised of women (Why Are There So Many Women In PR?, n.d.). Scholars have suggested that the sparse coverage of women in public relations history should be adjusted to reflect the demographic that represents it (Kern-Foxworth, 1989). After carefully examining the history of public relations, this essay seeks to provide an objective account of the establishment of modern public relations. The paper discusses the lives of rarely mentioned significant female public relations contributors, Ida Tarbell, Vira B. Whitehouse, Doris Fleischman, Jane Stewart, Muriel Fox and Inez Kaiser. The research obtained for this paper provides discussion on the scarcity of women in public relations history to draw conclusions on the issue’s present day persistence. Finally, the paper attempts to justify the inclusion of women in public relations’ history in future narratives.

## Introduction

Between 1913 and 1922, modern public relations was established as a profession (Henry, 1999). The profession was founded by men. Ivy Lee introduced the practice of keeping the public informed. Edward Bernays, who coined the term “public relations counsel”, described it as a prescription to a client on the most effective ways to navigate a complicated or hostile environment (Ewen, 1996). But women such as Ida Tarbell known for her muckraking journalism in the 1890s and Doris E. Fleischman, wife of Bernays and influential partner in his public relations practices have been left out or vaguely mentioned in the public relations history narrative of multiple textbooks (Lamme & Russell, 2017).

Karen Miller wrote about the lack of women depicted in public relations history in her literature review of female public relations executive Jane Stewart. Miller stated that “Many public relations scholars and media historians have called for more research on the history of women in the media, but there has been significant dialogue about what exactly should be examined or emphasized about women” (Miller, 1999, p. 250). It is important to provide an accurate account, including the significant contributions of women (Creedon, 1989), as they continue to shape the industry today.

According to a study published in the *Public Relations Review*, “...women comprise nearly 75% of the jobs in the public relations industry,” (Place & Winter, 2017 p. 165). History does not reflect this and instead is saturated with biographies of men and few women (Ken-Foxworth, 1989). Longtime Public Relations Practitioner, Professor and founder of the Museum of Public Relations, Shelley Spector addressed the disparity

at the museum's International Women's Day Celebration hosted in March of 2019. The event streamed live via Facebook and captured Spector's acknowledgment of female public relations pioneers Ida Tarbell, Doris Fleischman, Muriel Fox and Inez Kaiser (Museum of Public Relations, 2019).

As Spector did, this essay seeks to provide a more in-depth reflection to current female public relations practitioners by reporting an objective narrative of the history of modern public relations, including accounts of influential women who have been loosely mentioned throughout time. This paper identifies defining moments that contributed to developing modern public relations as a profession and explores the often misplaced information of the lives of women who have supported with worthwhile contributions. Lastly, this essay seeks to offer solid conclusions regarding rarely mentioned noteworthy female public relations pioneers and strives to strongly justify their inclusion in future narratives.

### **Pioneers in Public Relations: Men and Women**

The PRSA conducted a study between 2011 and 2012 which resulted in a modified definition of public relations. Today the organization defines public relations "as a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA, n.d., para. 5). While there are multiple definitions, no text has been able to identify solely one individual as the inventor. Stephenson (1960) states, "The inventor of the mirror and the inventor of public relations are alike unknown. The first must have shocked man into self-awareness. The second has had somewhat the same effect on American management in the twentieth century" (p. 9).

History suggests that the public relations profession was developed by several significant leaders who were men that introduced some of the standard tactics still used in the industry today. One of those contributors, Ivy Lee, is known as the founder of modern public relations (Olasky, 1987). Lee began his career as a journalist. He was a reporter for several New York based publications including the *New York Times*, the *New York American* and the *New York World* (Ewen, 1996). After several years of reporting, Lee resigned and set out to establish one of the nation's first public relations firms with friend and colleague George Parker. The firm, Parker and Lee, developed a motto of, "Accuracy, Authenticity and Interest" (Sheingate, 2016, p. 35).

Lee handled public relations for Judge Alton Parker's unsuccessful presidential run against Theodore Roosevelt (Ivy Lee, n.d.). He also represented the Pennsylvania Railroad and issued what is often considered to be the very first press release after he successfully convinced the organization to openly provide information about an accident that occurred to journalists. With his handling of the accident, many historians consider Lee the creator of modern crisis communications (Bhargava, 2012).

Cleveland business tycoon, John Rockefeller, hired Lee to represent his family's company, The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, after the Ludlow Massacre (Raucher, 1968). This massacre, which occurred after a gun battle between striking miners and Colorado state militia, resulted in several fatalities. Lee successfully managed the organization's image and eventually represented the Rockefeller family's corporate endeavors. Not only was Lee a public relations practitioner, but he was also a lobbyist

and a political activist that advocated for several causes such as foreign relations and disaster relief (Raucher, 1968).

Lee authored several books. One book, *Declaration of Principle*, identifies public relations representatives as having a public responsibility that extends beyond the obligations of a client. Drafted during the coal strike, Lee's writing outlined the guiding principles of his personal public relations theories. Its major points included factual accuracy, general discretion, and the importance of newspaper reporting and not of newspaper advertising (1906). *Declaration of Principle* is said to be undoubtedly Lee's longest lasting and most sweeping contribution to the public relations profession (Turney, 2015)

While Lee was indeed a pioneer for modern public relations, it is important to include in public relations history that the efforts of a woman contributed to prompting the need for big businesses like Pennsylvania Railroad to hire public relations practitioners. Ida Tarbell was known for muckraking, a practice of American journalists who sought to expose large organizations over corruption (Burt, 2000). Tarbell was one of the first female graduates of Allegheny College in 1880. Her work today is known as investigative journalism. During World War I, she worked actively to improve the livelihood of working women. "In 1922, The *New York Times* named her one of the Twelve Greatest American Women" (National Women's Hall of Fame, n.d., para. 4).

She wrote diligently about the unfair practices of oil companies swaying public opinion and provoking public officials to act (National Women's Hall of Fame, n. d.). Tarbell's *The History of the Standard Oil Company* was a widely circulated collection of

1902 articles that uncovered the hidden practices of the organization (Raucher, 1968). She offered detailed accounts from victims and workers connected to the company and was often referred to as “Tarbarrel,” by Rockefeller (Bradley, 1984).

Tarbell is significant to public relations because she worked as a reporter to expose big businesses participating in unethical business practices. Her writing had a significant impact on society during a time when businesses believed they could work alongside the press or even ignore it (Biagi, 2007). During this time stories appearing in the press promoted companies that bought advertisements and Tarbell worked to change that landscape by holding businesses accountable through her investigative reporting (Biagi, 2007). Businesses later responded to reporters and even began to solicit help from them, thus the development of public relations (Biagi, 2007). While her name is mentioned in Ewen’s Public relations book she is not credited with contributing to the initiation of public relations as a profession (Ewen, 1996). Additionally she is not mentioned in Philip Lesly’s 636-page book, *Handbook of Public Relations and Communications* (1969). Kathleen Brady author of her biography titled *Ida Tarbell Portrait of a Muckraker* states “she was called to achievement in a day when women were called only to exist. Her triumph was that she succeeded. Her tragedy was never to know it” (1984 p. 255).

Tarbell is not mentioned in the *Handbook of Public Relations* an 800-page book edited by Howard Stephenson (Stephenson, 1971), and she is briefly mentioned twice in Stuart Ewen’s *PR! A Social History of Spin* a book that provides a lengthy look into the history of public relations and discusses Ivy Lee, Standard Oil Company and John D.



Rockefeller in great detail (Ewen, 1996). Still, her work forced large companies to evaluate their practices and provide rebuttals to the public further solidifying a need for public relations practitioners (National Women's Hall of Fame, n.d.). *The History of the Standard Oil Company* remains a classic of investigative reporting, and Tarbell's legacy as someone who took seriously the ethics of truthfully informing the public is a guiding premise in public relations today (PRSA Code of Ethics: Preamble, n.d.). Tarbell's motivation to report honestly and fairly is reflected in the PRSA's Code of Ethics, "Core Principle Protecting and advancing the free flow of accurate and truthful information is essential to serving the public interest and contributing to informed decision making in a democratic society" (PRSA Code of Ethics: Preamble, n.d., para.13). Like journalists, public relations practitioners are held to most of the same standards (PRSA Code of Ethics: Preamble, n.d.), the same standards that Tarbell patterned her business after early on.

Edward Bernays is another public relations mogul that is widely acknowledged in history's textbooks. Ewen explains that he is "one of the most influential pioneers of American public relations who left a deep mark on the configuration of our world" (Ewen, 1996, p. 3). It is important to acknowledge that Ewen opens his book *PR A Social History of Spin* discussing the life of Bernays and mentions him significantly throughout the 448-page text. He goes on to acknowledge his wife Doris Fleischman (who we discuss later on page 15) one time in the entire typescript.

Nonetheless Bernays helped to develop the profession and established an agency organized and run like Lee's (Raucher, 1968). Bernays, a native of Vienna and transplant

of New York, was the nephew of famed psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and based his public relations strategies off of the ideologies of Freud (Ewen, 1996). He graduated from Cornell University with a degree in agriculture.

Bernays who worked as a press agent is known for approaching the topic of public relations as a science, and for combining Freud's theories on psychoanalysis with other sociological theories to develop his ground breaking public relations methods. "Public relations covers the relations of a man, institution, idea, with its publics. Any efficient attempt to improve these relations depends on our understanding of the behavioral sciences and applying them-sociology, social psychology, anthropology, history etc" ("What Do the Social Sciences," 1971, p. 10) said Bernays in an interview with *Public Relations Quarterly* in 1971.

Bernays was intrigued by Freud's idea that irrational forces drive human behavior, thus he developed strategic events that would garner attention for his clients. "In his 1928 book, *Propaganda*, Bernays hypothesized that by understanding the group mind, it would be possible to manipulate people's behavior without their even realizing it. To test this hypothesis, Bernays launched one of his most famous public relations campaigns: convincing women to smoke" (Held, 2009, p. 32).

He taught the first collegiate public relations course at New York University and authored a public relations textbook titled *Crystalizing Public Opinion*. He developed market research, social surveys and public opinion polls, three tools to influence public consent (Bernays, 1923). Bernays fashioned himself as a public relations counsel and introduced the press kit, a pre-packaged set of publicity resources that provide

information about a person, company or cause and is disseminated to members of the media for promotional use. The press kit also known as a media kit has become another widespread practice in the public relations industry today (Ewen, 1996).

### **Defining Moments in Public Relations History**

Bernays served on the United States Committee on Public Information's (CPI) Foreign Press Bureau publicizing Former President Woodrow Wilson's war aims and helping to break down enemy morale (Bernays, 1972). The CPI is a significant part of public relations history, and is known as a powerful propaganda agency, established in 1918, organized to package, advertise and sell the war to the American people on every available medium. The CPI commissioned by President Wilson was led by journalist and activist George Creel (Telzrow, 2017). "The Wilson administration brought the most modern management techniques to bear in the area of government-press relations" (Daly, 2017, para.4).

Born in Missouri, Creel was a staunch supporter of Wilson, the publisher of his own newspaper and developed a reputation as a diligent investigative reporter or muckraker. The CPI, referred to by Creel as "the world's greatest adventure in advertising" (Telzrow, 2017 p. 1), employed 20,000 people most of which were volunteers. This population was comprised of writers, scholars, artists, and progressive crusaders. "Two sections (Domestic and Foreign) oversaw the activities of more than 20 subdivisions. There were divisions for almost every human activity, including business management and 'women's work'" (Telzrow, 2017 p.2). The CPI also implemented

subdivisions which included the Labor Publications, Pictorial Publications, Film Division and the Division of Four-Minute Men.

The Division of Four-Minute Men was a successful unit of the CPI rarely omitted from public relations history. It was developed by Chicago native Donald Ryerson and was a traveling speaking organization comprised of volunteers who gave four minute speeches on topics involving the war. The Four-Minute Men was an organized movement that evolved into developed chapters led by directors commissioned throughout the United States. Members of the Four-Minute Men were sworn in and provided an outline on language that was suggested and frowned upon. "For each of the 36 separate campaigns covered by 46 bulletins, these totals would yield an average of 28,000 speeches heard by over 11,000,000 people for the eighteen-month period, the life of the Four-Minute Men" (Larson & Mock, 1939, p. 111-112). While the Four-Minute Men was an effort established under the CPI it is remembered as a sound historical feat driven largely by men that shaped communications and speech throughout the century (Telzrow, 2017).

While information was easily accessible on the Four-Minute Men, it was only through in depth research that Vira B. Whitehouse, the nation's first female public diplomat, CPI Director for Berne, Switzerland, was discovered (West, 2018). It is important to take a brief detour and acknowledge that women were largely discriminated against during this time. Their role in society was limited and women across the United States began to lead movements in the 1800s and 1900s to diversify their roles and expand their rights. An example of this is the women's suffrage movement, which was a

decades long fight for women to win the right to vote in the United States. This was an effort that consumed the time of many dedicated women who were shunned and mistreated for courageously speaking out against the injustices prevalent within society at that time (Crawford, 2001).

Whitehouse voyaged on the nation's behalf to direct publicity for the United States war efforts. Prior to her appointment, the Louisiana native served as a diligent activist and leader on the New York State Woman Suffrage Party. She was a courageous orator and volunteer who worked to successfully pass an amendment granting women suffrage in November of 1917 for the state of New York (Glant, 2002). Her work for this cause involved securing publicity, making cold calls and even raising money for the suffrage's movement. Scholar Lauren Claire West referred to her as a blooming publicist in her thesis titled *The Uneasy Beginnings of Public Diplomacy: Vira Whitehouse, the Committee on Public Information, and the First World War*.

Whitehouse advocated continually for women's rights. And when society claimed that "women's place was in the home," Whitehouse launched a campaign where she encouraged women word of mouth not to leave their homes. She sought to change the perspective of society with this command, stressing the significance of women having the right to do what they choose. As women were expected to fulfill all the duties required to maintain the home such as grocery shopping and child rearing, staying in their homes prevented them from completing these tasks (West, 2018).

There were few men who joined the fight against women's suffrage and Creel was one of them, thus the development of Creel and Whitehouse's relationship. He

became familiar with her experience in working with publicity campaigns and secretly appointed her to serve on the CPI (Whitehouse, 1920). Creel was later criticized (Glant, 2002) and Whitehouse faced much scrutiny because of her gender. “What experience could a woman have to fit her for such work in so delicate a situation” (Whitehouse 1920, p. 2). She stated this as the response to her appointment in her telling memoir *A Year as a Government Agent*. She was denied access to a diplomatic passport and had arrived in Switzerland for six months before she received clearance to implement and execute working orders on behalf of the CPI (West, 2018).

Nonetheless Whitehouse persisted and continued with her duties that soon became known as public diplomacy. *Everthing-pr.com* defines public diplomacy as the carefully-structured discussions or communication that takes place between the public and an organization. The organization involved with public diplomacy can be a business, a non-profit organization or even a government body, (James, 2018)

Whitehouse was responsible for driving this communication in Switzerland. She worked to provide accurate information about American news to Swiss newspapers (Glant, 2002). She worked to develop pamphlets, films and photographs and had many of President Wilson’s speeches translated to German. Whitehouse also arranged for Swiss reporters to visit the United States. After a year, she submitted resignation and returned home. It is reported that she experienced much hesitation and delay throughout her tenure in Switzerland and her wishes for plans to be concrete and more organized were met with dysfunction and deferral.

Her work in Switzerland was considered impactful and she was praised by Creel. The words of Swiss journalists visiting the United States regarding Whitehouse's impact are cited by Creel in Professor Tibor Glant's writing titled *Against all Odds: Vira B. Whitehouse and Rosika Schwimmer in Switzerland, 1918*. The journalists explained, "...it was never the case that we were pro-Germans, but rather did not know America. This was the knowledge she gave us, openly, honestly and with rare intelligence" (Glant, 2002, p. 39).

Whitehouse was a pioneer. "She worked tirelessly to influence public attitudes through her dedication to fully printing many of Wilson's speeches, including his speech appealing to the Austrian-Hungarians peoples" (West, 2018 p. 83). The CPI is used as a turning point in public relations history, Whitehouse's contributions although vaguely mentioned are noteworthy also. Professor Glant who examined the lack of historical information regarding female diplomats who contributed to the first World War in his writing stated "Whitehouse came to be forgotten despite the obvious success of her mission" (Glant, 2002 p. 48).

The CPI employed one of the most prominent promotion tactics and that was propaganda (Bernays, 1952). Public Relations Pioneer Bernays discusses the significance of propaganda in his 1952 book titled *Public Relations*, (where he mentions wife Fleischman one time). "The war taught us the power of propaganda," (Bernays, 1952, p. 78). One cannot successfully delve into the history of modern public relations as a profession without learning about propaganda. Much of the profession's practices today are derived from the historic marketing technique. Propaganda is defined by the *Funk &*

*Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia* as the dissemination of ideas and information for the purpose of convincing the masses of specific attitudes and actions (2018).

“Because propaganda is frequently accompanied by distortions of fact and by appeals to passion and prejudice, the word is often used to refer to information that is false or intentionally misleading, and it is generally used pejoratively,” (Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia, 2018, para.1). According to PRSA, “the word was coined in the 17th century by the Roman Catholic Church and originally meant writing to propagate the faith” (PRSA, n.d., para. 23).

As mentioned earlier this paper seeks to highlight the history of the profession of modern public relations including the significant moments that women contributed to shape it. An example of this is the early use of propaganda depicted in the illustration of “Rosie the Riveter,” titled “We Can Do It.” The poster was of a woman wearing a red bandana and overalls, flexing her biceps and included the caption “We Can Do It.” The design was meant to encourage women to take on and maintain the responsibilities of men who were away from their homes serving in the war. This propaganda design was a turning point for women in history as they had been limited to homemaking and other domestic activities (Rosie the Riveter, n.d.). World War II provided an opportunity for women to enter the workforce and earn an hourly wage. “The poster gave many women the motivation to enter the workforce and to take on the roles of men. This poster also gave motivation to the women who were already in the workforce to persevere” (Shah, 2015, para. 4).



## **Women in Public Relations**

The goal of this paper was to identify those women who were influential to the profession during its inception and throughout its development. Discussed further are four women, Doris Fleischman, Jane Stewart, Muriel Fox and Inez Kaiser. Each of these women carved paths of their own. They served as public relations practitioners during a difficult time for women in our society. Their persistence and advocacy led to groundbreaking accomplishments in the industry that are rarely mentioned today (Museum of Public Relations, 2019).

### **Doris Fleischman**

Propaganda, Four-Minute Men, CPI, Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee are significant to the fiber of modern public relations. It is the author's goal to expound upon these historic moments, inserting the rarely mentioned narratives of women such as, Ida Tarbell and Vira Whitehouse who were influential during that time. Eventually, society evolved (i.e. woman suffrage) and women began to take on new roles that they actively fought for (The National Women's Hall of Fame, n.d.). Bernays' wife Doris Fleischman is an example of that transition as she is reportedly the first woman to formerly practice modern public relations (Museum of Public Relations, 2019). Born in 1891, Fleishman was a journalist recruited to work for Bernays' firm. The two married in 1922, and Fleischman became an equal partner in the Bernays firm.

Fleischman was influential in the deployment of several of the firm's public relations activities. She worked alongside Bernays to develop campaigns, such as the promotion of American Tobacco Company. The campaign sold cigarettes as a lifestyle to

women which involved a group of females smoking in public to challenge male power at the New York annual Easter Parade in 1929 (Heath, 2005). The duo also developed a campaign that involved convincing doctors to validate that bacon and eggs were an appropriate meal for breakfast to promote bacon for Beechnut Packing Company as they suffered a decline in sales (Heath, 2005). They served a diverse mix of clients, which included General Electric, Procter & Gamble, media outlets like *CBS* and even politicians such as former President Calvin Coolidge (Gunderman, 2015).

Bernays received significant influence from Fleischman. It is significant to reiterate that while Bernays graduated from Cornell University with a degree in agriculture, Fleischman was a graduate of Barnard College. There she pursued liberal arts and studied twice the number of English courses required for completion of her degree. Today Fleischman's academic history would be more attractive to a public relations agency over Bernays' as her background proves that she has more training in writing, a significant component of the modern public relations profession (Lepper, 2012).

Fleischman was a New York native and women's rights advocate. She worked as a reporter for the women's page of the *New York Tribune* and became the first female journalist to cover a boxing match (Lamme, 2007). She later served as a public relations practitioner and even provided freelance public relations support for the first National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) meeting in 1920 in Atlanta, Georgia. Though controversial at the time, Fleischman secured press coverage for the meeting and provided direction to the journalists who covered the event (Henry, 1999).

Bernays referred to Fleischman, as his associate in his 1952 book titled *Public Relations* (1952). He received most of the credit for the firm's accomplishments and failed to acknowledge Fleischman who was instrumental in providing support for most of the firm's projects by implementing innovative campaigns, providing organized structure and constructive criticism to Bernays' embellished rhetoric (Henry, 1998). Additionally, Fleischman was unable to sit in on meetings with male clients and her office was situated upstairs away from the view of prospective clients (Heath, 2005). Bernays proceeded with this arrangement mentioning later that Fleischman's presence would have jeopardized the potential of the firm securing business with certain clients due to the prejudice of the times (Henry, 1998).

Public Relations Professor and Practitioner, Margot Opdycke Lamme wrote in an article that Fleischman is often portrayed as a kind of sidebar to Bernays as opposed to a lateral business partner (Lamme 2007). It is documented that Fleischman served with Bernays' firm for more than fifty years. Bernays was in his 90s when he finally admitted that Fleischman was "equally responsible for the agency's accomplishments and there is no doubt that she had a remarkable career as a pioneering public relations professional" (Henry, 1998, p.1).

Journalist Anne Bernays, daughter of Bernays and Fleischman discussed the life of Fleischman in an article for the *Washington Post* in 2017. She also confirmed her parents' partnership in business stating that "for decades, she partnered with my father at their public relations firm. She published hundreds of articles and a book encouraging working women" (2017, para., 2). Fleischman's most significant contributions to the

profession of public relations was her work on strategizing and planning (Heath, 2005). “She was not only an excellent technician, writing speeches and releases, but she was also a conscientious planner and innovator in public relations campaigns” (Heath, 2005, p. 329). She was described as a primary support and assistant to her husband (Lamme, 2001).

Fleishman also declined to take on Bernays’ last name early on and became the first married woman to be issued a United States passport with her birth name. In her 1955 book, *A Wife is Many Women*, Fleischman demonstrated that being progressive and independent were not mutually exclusive from being a wife, mother and head of household (Bernays, 1955). She was involved in several other causes such as women’s rights where she advocated for working women. Fleischman was balancing the lifestyle of wife, mother, business woman and community member, a common practice in today’s society and she advocated for others to do same.

Fleischman was the creator and author of the first public relations newsletter that reached 15,000 media professionals and business executives for corporate and non-profit organizations (Creedon, 1989). She also wrote *An Outline of Careers for Women: A Pratical Guide to Achievement*, a book that provided guidance on careers emerging for women in 1928. Fleischman wrote a chapter on public relations in the book where she encouraged women to seek a career in the profession. She stated that “No traditions have grown against women’s participation in it, and women will share the responsibility of developing and shaping this new profession” (Fleischman, 1928, p.385).

Lamme explores the nonfiction works of Fleischman to determine why as the business partner and wife of Bernays she is left out of public relations history in her article titled *Furious Desires and Victorious Careers: Doris E. Fleischman, Counsel of Public Relations and Advocate for Working Women*. She mentions that Fleischman valued her role as one of the industry's pioneers, and her primary focus was women's rights (Lamme, 2001). "To consider Fleischman's work solely in the context of public relations is to neglect her larger role as an advocate for working women" (Lamme, 2001, p. 13).

While Fleischman was passionate about women rights she was also influential in providing support to the groundbreaking success that Bernays achieved throughout his career. She wrote about her experiences as partner to Bernays in *A Wife is Many Women*, the book documented the many roles she played and she states, "Slowly in the course of my work with Eddie, I learned that men were not altogether happy about career women. In the early days of public relations, I was an exception in a masculine world" (Bernays, 1955, p.171). In an article titled, *Public Relations history misses 'her story'* author Pamela Creedon examines the context of female public relations pioneers used in public relations text books. Creedon argues that Fleischman is mentioned by name in only four of the ten texts examined (Creedon, 1989).

### **Jane Stewart**

Jane Stewart joins the ranks of Fleischman, Whitehouse, Tarbell and other rarely mentioned female public relations pioneers who trail blazed the then male dominated industry of the early to mid 1900's. Jane Stewart was a public relations executive who

helped to diversify the public relations industry serving in a leadership capacity for a well-known public relations research firm. “Public relations scholars know very little about the women who participated in formal public relations before the 1970s, not even about such women as Jane Stewart, who served as vice president and then president of Group Attitudes Corporation, an independent consulting firm that became a subsidiary of Hill and Knowlton of New York in 1956” (Miller, 1997 p. 349).

Stewart was born Anna Jane Stewart in Pennsylvania, she later relocated to New York with her family. She graduated from Ohio Wesleyan where she double majored in history and education. Stewart was active in several organizations during her time at Ohio Wesleyan including the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) (Miller, 1997). After graduation in 1939, Stewart went to work in the press relations department for Long Island Rail Road. She spent 5 years there as an assistant. She later transitioned to public relations firm, Hill & Knowlton where she worked as an office manager for 5 years. She worked diligently in this role and was praised by Hill & Knowlton for going to great lengths to be helpful (Miller, 1997) and later moved on to work in an official public relations capacity with Group Attitudes Corporation where she was a founding member. Group Attitudes Corporation was formally established by John Mapes, a former top executive at Hill & Knowlton, who later became her husband (Miller, 1997).

An increasingly important part of the public relations profession at midcentury was research, which allowed organizations to develop strategic programs to effectively communicate with their audiences (Russell & Lamme, 2017). Group Attitude Corporation was a public relations research firm, that Stewart rose through the ranks of as

vice president and later president. She led interviews and conducted research for the organization's client base that included Fortune 500 companies (Miller, 1997).

Stewart was influential at Group Attitudes Corporation because she was not afraid to stand up to men. She talked firmly and was assertive in meetings. She was remembered for meeting men, even the steel industry leaders who were known for having less than progressive attitudes toward female executives (Miller, 1997). "She worked on behalf of the U.S. steel industry during a time of strained labor relations when understanding workers – and their wives – had an important impact on industry public relations" (Lamme & Russell, 2017, p. 5). Stewart's colleagues and former employees described her as a well-dressed professional who believed in going the extra mile to get the job done. She spoke about the research she conducted expressing the importance of interviewers asking questions instead of solely depending on formal surveys (Miller, 1997). Her obituary in the *New York Times* mentions that she was recognized by trade advertising magazine *Printer's Ink* in 1966 as one of America's 40 top women in executive positions in communications and marketing ("Jane Mapes, 73, Dies," 1990).

Much of her success could be credited to John Mapes who gave her the opportunity to work in a leadership position during a time when it was unheard of. Mapes did this potentially compromising his own livelihood (Miller, 1997). It is reported that Mapes and Stewart were romantically tied during their working relationship thus making it difficult to determine if the chemistry between them had bearings on Stewart's success in the organization. Still, her leadership position was acquired and maintained at a time when it was difficult for women to obtain management roles.

She advised a group of students at Barnard College during a lecture to “look like a woman, think like a man, act like a lady and work like a horse” (Miller, 1997, p. 167). Stewart had a career significant to public relations history. “She blazed a trail that other women soon followed, but she apparently never saw past the pragmatic position she carved out for herself to envision a time when an executive could think, act, and work as a woman, and not just look like one” (Miller, 1997, p. 167).

### **Muriel Fox**

Thus far, we have discussed four influential women who have made significant contributions to public relations history, Muriel Fox also joins this group as a public relations professional and women’s rights advocate who emerged in the 1950s. The New Jersey native was born to a grocer and homemaker and she decided early that she did not want to limit herself to working exclusively inside the home. In 2010 interview, with Jennifer Altmann from Barnard College, Fox stated “My mother never had an opportunity to fulfill herself. She was a very unhappy person. In those days, half the population was required to take one occupation: housewife. She was terrible at it. I was determined I wasn’t going to live that life” (Altmann, 2016, para. 3). Fox went on to graduate from Barnard College with a degree in American studies.

She later worked for Sears & Roebuck as a copywriter and she also worked on the campaigns of elected officials. Fox later applied for well-known public relations firm Carl Byoir and Associates. Byoir was one of the "founding fathers" of public relations, together with Lee and Bernays. An early pioneer during and after World War I, he created and organized one of the world's largest public relation firms (New World



Encyclopedia, n.d.). Fox was turned away as women were not hired as writers but secretaries. She remained persistent in her pursuit with the Byoir firm. She was eventually hired, later becoming the youngest vice president of the organization in 1956. Fox worked for Carl Byoir and Associates for 34 years. Fox mentioned that her job at the Carl Byoir agency involved telling a good story for her clients. She developed events and organized strategic plans for her clients to secure media coverage.

In an interview with Wenxian Zhang, from Rollin College, Fox mentioned that the greatest challenge in her career was sex discrimination. “My boss would say Muriel you’re amazing but this is as far as you’ll go because no one can relate to a woman,” (2010, para. 8)). It is during that time that she helped to establish the National Organization for Women (NOW), likening it to the NAACP, but for women.

NOW established in 1966, advocated for equitable practices amongst women in the United States. Fox oversaw Public Relations for NOW, and was the Operations Lieutenant to President, Women’s Activist and Author Betty Friedan. Fox also served on NOW’s National Board from 1966 to 1975. She wrote and distributed NOW’s first press release and participated in the NOW campaign that convinced Lyndon Johnson to add women to Executive Order 11246 in October of 1967 an order that established non-discriminatory practices in hiring and employment, which created jobs for millions of women through affirmative action. Fox was also involved in the NOW campaign to desegregate Help Wanted ads, and testified to Congress for equalizing pensions in 1970. She founded and edited the first NOW National newsletter titled *Do it NOW* (“Muriel Fox,” n.d.).

Fox worked behind the scenes of women's rights writing a great deal of letters for NOW that Friedan signed. She wanted to spare her career but the causes that she helped bring attention to were still important to her. Fox said, "I stayed in the background" (Altmann, 2016, para.13). She discussed the importance of her work with NOW, stating "For thousands of years, women were the chattel of men, and in our lifetime that concept has changed in many societies... We changed the world, and that's very satisfying" (Altmann, 2016, para.16). In an interview with Shelley Spector, founder of the Museum of Public Relations, Fox stated, "I am very proud that I introduced the modern women's movement to the media of the world and I was able to use my public relations expertise for that"( During her time working with NOW, Fox was also actively working 60 hours a week for Carl Byoir and Associates. She was also raising two young children with her husband who also became active in the NOW movement. He even served as chairman for the New York chapter and when he was asked about his involvement with the movement he responded with, "I want my wife to make more money" (Altmann, 2016, para.8).

### **Inez Kaiser**

Ines Kaiser also has a similar story to the other women discussed throughout this paper. Her contributions were significant and they are often forgotten or unmentioned. Kaiser was one of the first African American women to work in public relations. Born in 1918, she was a native of Missouri and grew up during a time when African Americans were unable to pursue higher education. Nonetheless Kaiser persisted becoming a graduate of Pittsburg State University in Kansas City, Missouri. She earned a bachelor's degree in education and taught home economics for Evanston, Illinois; Kansas City,

Kansas; and Kansas City, Missouri, schools for twenty years. She earned a master's degree from Columbia University and was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Lincoln University (Helm, 2016).

Kaiser was described by her son as a determined and strong willed professional, "you didn't mess with her, she would harass you, badger you, hound you until she got what she wanted" (Helm, 2016, para. 4) he said. It was her work on her regular column titled *Fashion-wise and Otherwise* published weekly in African-American publications across the United States that led her to a career in public relations. In 1957 at the age of 39, she decided to pursue a career in the profession and later became the first African American woman to establish a public relations firm. This endeavor also made her the first African American to own a business in Kansas City, Missouri. Kaiser was also the first African American to become a member of PRSA. Inez Kaiser and Associates secured national clients such as Sears, Seven Up and Pillsbury. "She pushed for minority women to have a seat at the table, advocated for greater civil rights and advised two presidents as part of a panel on minority women in business" (Schmitt, 2016, para. 2).

As an African American woman, Kaiser faced adversities throughout her career. When she decided to begin her search for office space to operate her new business, she had a hard time securing space (Stanton, n.d.). Each realtor would explain that there was no space available, she finally threatened to go to the news and share her story of discrimination, and shortly after was granted space. Kaiser mentioned later in an interview "I was just a woman who happened to be black and good, persistence and patience are the biggest things I've learned" (Stanton, n.d., p.4). By the age of 62, Kaiser

had been cited in 17 magazines as one of the best home economics teachers. She was a recipient of the Missouri State Teachers Association's "Teacher of the Year" award and was named Business Woman of the Year in Kansas City (Helm, 2016).

Like some of the others mentioned in this essay, Kaiser also worked to balance her professional and personal life. When she started her firm most successful public relations firms were located in New York or Los Angeles, Kaiser worked hard to convince her clients that the Midwest was just as suitable because she didn't want to relocate her family. "I firmly believe a woman has to be able to balance a career and keep a family together. My son was in the ninth grade when I went into business, and I didn't want to relocate" (Stanton, n.d., para. 26).

In 2017, PRSA hosted an event recognizing influential African Americans in the public relations industry. Kaiser who died in 2016 was honored for her contributions along with two other African American public relations pioneers. "As an aspiring PR pro, I often wondered where our place was in the history of this profession. In our classes and in our textbooks, we often learn about Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee — and not about Inez Kaiser and others" (Agyakwa, 2017, para. 3), said communications graduate student, Kevin Agyakwa in an article recounting the event for PRSA.

### **Scarcity in Public Relations**

The goal of this paper is to acknowledge the significant moments of modern public relations history and the influential people that helped to shape them. It was equally as important to investigate those moments to provide a more accurate depiction including the women who were involved but rarely mentioned. It is imperative to

understand and tell their stories as the industry has evolved exponentially and is largely populated today by women.

Karla Gower, Assistant Professor of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Alabama discusses the absence of women in public relations history narratives in her journal titled *Rediscovering Women in Public Relations: Women in the Public Relations Journal 1945-1972* (2001). In her writing she opens with the acknowledgement that historical studies of women in the public relations field are rare. Her composition further examines the Public Relations Journal a publication of PRSA from 1945 until 1972 to gain understanding of women's roles in public relations. Gower selects these years as the journal was established in 1945 and the organization elected its first female chairman in 1972 (2001).

Gower identifies multiple reasons for the lack of studies on women in public relations history, one being that for the first seven decades few women were not employed in public relations and the number of women that held executive positions was even more minimal (2001). She also adds that the historical record of the public relations profession in general and women in public relations is scarce or non-existent.

She finds that women were included in some of the issues during its early inception and adds that when the Journal obtained new editors the information on women would sometimes decline. Gower reported that during the time period of 1945 until 1972 2,260 articles were published, of that number 100 were written by women and nine specifically discussed women in public relations. Gower concluded that "The record of women's contributions to public relations found there should serve as an enticement to

public relations historians to probe those contributions in greater depth” (Gower, 2001, p. 19).

Public Relations Practitioner and Associate Professor Marilyn Kern-Foxworth also writes on the disparities of female coverage in public relations textbooks in her article titled *Public relations books fail to show women in context* (1989). Kern-Foxworth references history adding that when women entered the workforce during World War II most women did not return to their domestic duties when the men came home from the War. She also mentions that the emergence and acceptance of women as having equal rights in social, economic and political forms might have been the largest psychological readjustment for America in the twentieth century (1989).

She goes on to reference a statement from another author which suggests America’s resistance to fully embrace the equality of women established during the twentieth century. “There are about 15 major textbook companies which control about 90 percent of the textbook market. And they have the image of women as helpmate, as mother, as observer of male activities, included in every book. School attendance is compulsory in this country. This means that every young girl must read about herself as passive citizen for twelve years by law” (1989 p. 31). Kern-Foxworth references several other textbook studies also seeking to explore the absence of women in the context. While Kern-Foxworth focuses on public relations, her approach to explore the lack of female coverage in most textbooks adds an interesting perspective. She concludes the article with providing suggestions for teachers and professors to ensure the future inclusion of women in public relations history lessons.

Kern-Foxworth's article was published in 1989, one could easily argue that the information reported is irrelevant. However, Professors Karen Miller Russell and Margot Opdycke Lamme published an article in 2017 also suggesting that women in public relations history text is sparse. The article titled *Public Relations History Through Women's Eyes* (2017) seeks to provide an objective history lesson on public relations through the lens of women. "Glancing through a stack of introductory public relations textbooks, a reader will soon discover that in the chapters about public relations history, a handful of the same stories are told over and over, with relatively few characters and the same plot twists repeated again and again. Typically, we read the stories of P.T. Barnum, Ivy Lee, and Edward Bernays, hear of the war propaganda generated during World Wars I and II, and track the growth of mostly 20th century, New York-based corporations and agencies. But looking at public relations history through women's eyes offers a different perspective" (2017 p. 123). Russell and Lamme state that women are not telling the stories.

The duo also suggests that information on female public relations pioneers has been misplaced and could stand some redirecting. For example, although not a developed profession until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, society saw public relations efforts in the work of women activists who advocated tirelessly to effect social change. Women suffragists can be considered public relations pioneers as their work to broaden their reach on voting rights and other equality issues involved publicity, fundraising and advocacy campaigns. Lamme and Russell reminds us of American Women's Activist Susan B. Anthony. Anthony was a pioneer crusader for the woman suffrage movement in the United

States and president of the National Woman Suffrage Association (2017). She staged an attention-grabbing demonstration at the U.S. centennial celebration in Philadelphia to promote woman suffrage, these efforts can be compared to the attention-getting campaigns that Bernay's developed well after her time

Journalism Professor Pamela Creedon mentioned earlier, offers a different perspective in her article titled *Public relations history misses 'her story'* (1989). Author Creedon describes the recorded history of women in public relations as "sketchy." Creedon conducts an examination on ten public relations textbooks and finds that while the names of female pioneers in public relations are mentioned, additional information like the lengthy biographies on Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays are not included. She quotes a passage from the late journalism historian Catherine Covert, "A great deal of what has been experienced by both men and women in journalism has not been recorded by historians or has been recorded in ways compatible with thought patterns and values characteristic: of white American males" (Covert, 1981, p. 2).

Creedon endorses the thoughts of another historian, referencing the approach of Susan Henry, author of an in-depth study on Fleischman. Henry's approach was to provide an objective account on Fleischman's family life as a child, early life as a professional and her experience as a wife and mother. Henry argued that society focuses largely on triumph and she stressed the importance of reporting conflict and tragedy. Based upon this strategy, Creedon calls for reevaluation of the history of public relations. Creedon suggests that this approach entails a reanalysis of the entire history of public relations to reevaluate the standards used to establish the meaning of value in the field, "it



also involves reanalysis of the entire history of public relations to reappraise the criteria used to establish the meaning of value in the field,” (Creedon, 1989, p. 29). The reappraisal approach to public relations history would account for diverse racial, gender, and class perspectives on the development of the field.

Scholars Diane Martinelli of West Virginia University and Elizabeth Toth of the University of Maryland also write about the lack of women in public relations history in their academic essay titled *Lessons on the Big Idea and Public Relations: Reflections on the 50-Year Career of Charlotte Klein*. Their writing explores the life of another rarely discussed public relations pioneer, Charlotte Klein (n.d.). The authors mention the challenge of a researcher encouraging scholars to join in contributing to the history on women in public relations. Martinelli and Toth respond by stating, “this charge can be challenging, given the scarcity of early women PR executives in the profession’s first decades and the nature of the business itself, where practitioners project the limelight on their clients, but remain in the background” (n.d., p. 2). Promoting the work of the client in the public relations profession is a significant part of the job as stated earlier, Muriel Fox’s statement of staying in the background when doing her work for NOW, further confirming Martinelli’s and Toth’s point.

The goal of this paper was to define why this information is rarely mentioned in history’s text, thus we explored the literature of scholars who have sought to explain the deficit of women in public relations’ history. In closing it is the author’s wish to rationalize the inclusion of discussed information in future narratives. As mentioned earlier the public relations industry is largely populated by women. The profession that

was once largely dominated by men has since transitioned and the history books should reflect and tell the story of this transformation. Public relations scholars and professors have advocated for such inclusion also. “Adding such women to the field’s historical record can only give us a richer understanding of public relations, demonstrating to students and industry alike that our history reflects the expertise and the inclusion we continue to strive for today” (Russell & Lamme, 2017 p. 123).

Our society is diverse. It is important for history to appropriately share the stories of everyone who have made significant contributions. “It is imperative that students understand that society is not monolithic but a pluralistic dynamic in which women are central components. The portrayal of women in public relations textbooks does not parallel the real world role of women possibly because most of the textbooks were written by men” (Kern-Foxworth, 1989, p. 35).

The scarce visibility of narratives on women in public relations history can be likened to the issue of representation in the media, a discussion that has been ongoing for years (Grollman, n.d.). Researcher, Activist and Educator, Dr. Eric Anthony Grollman discusses the significance of representations in his article titled *The Importance Of Representation: Voice, Visibility, And Validation In America*. The article discusses the importance of diversity and inclusion. He also discusses the significance of “seeing yourself”, a discussion relative to the argument of developing more female public relations narratives in history books. “There was a recent study featured in the media that finds evidence of a self-esteem boosting effect of television for white boys, but self-esteem damaging effects for white girls, black girls, and black boys. One primary reason?

White boys see lots of white boys and men in the shows they watch. And, not just that, but they regularly see these characters and actors in positive, powerful, and central roles. This is less so the case for other kids” (Grollman, n.d., para 10).

Author and Racial Justice Activist Debrah Wilson discusses the importance of representation in literature and references two words, inclusivity and perception. She argues that “seeing people who look, act, and experience life like them in media and literature makes a person feel included in a society, and it reinforces positive views of themselves and what they can achieve in society” (Ackerman, 2018, para. 6). This perspective can be compared to the stories of the public relations pioneers discussed throughout this essay. These female pioneers advocated for their right to be working wives, mothers and active community members treated with equality. While the lifestyles they lived had yet to be normalized in our society thus the women’s suffrage movement, substantial coverage of their stories in history books would serve as motivation to women in pursuit of this career and lifestyle.

### **Summary**

The public relations profession was founded by men such as Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays. The occupation nearly a century old, was established to rebut criticism of big businesses. The early establishment of public relations included defining moments such as deployment of the CPI during World War I and the use of propaganda which carried on through World War II, later becoming a marketing staple used by Bernays and others to promote the work of their clients.

Public relations has since transitioned into a profession largely populated by women. Several scholars have argued that public relations history is slightly inaccurate as it promotes the stories of men in great lengths while simply mentioning or omitting the stories of those significant female public relations pioneers. The purpose of this paper was to develop an objective narrative of the early development of modern public relations. Through research the paper discusses those female innovators that were also significant during the profession's early establishment.

Ida Tarbell initiated the public relations profession through her muckraking known as investigative journalism which prompted big businesses to hire public relations professionals. Women Suffragist Vira B. Whitehouse and rarely mentioned public diplomacy pioneer contributed to the CPI, a defining moment for the public relations profession. Doris Fleischman is identified as the first woman to practice public relations (Museum of Public Relations, 2019) and helped to institute one of the nation's first public relations firms. Jane Stewart rose to the ranks of president for one of the nation's first public relations research firms during a time when men dominated the public relations industry. Muriel Fox served as Vice President for public relations firm, Carl Byoir and Associates and prevailed to this role after receiving much hesitation as women served primarily as secretaries during that time. Fox also implemented and oversaw public relations efforts for women's organization NOW whose advocacy in women's rights helped to change the civil rights landscape of our society today. Lastly, Inez Kaiser served as the first African American woman to open a public relations firm and the first African American to join PRSA. She advocated for minorities in business and advised

two presidents regarding minority business. These women are identified significant female contributors who are rarely mentioned in today's history books.

Spector acknowledged some of the women mentioned thus far and the scarcity of females in public relations history at an event in March of 2019. It was the objective of this paper to identify why these women have been rarely mentioned in public relations history. Gower concluded that for the first seven decades few women were not employed in public relations and the number of women that held executive positions was even more minimal. She also added that the historical record of the public relations profession in general and women in public relations is scarce or non-existent. Kern-Foxworth adds that the emergence and acceptance of women as having equal rights in social, economic and political forms might have been the largest psychological readjustment for America in the twentieth century. She later adds that society is still reluctant to see women in diverse roles. Russell and Lamme argue that women aren't telling the stories. They add that history should be told from a woman's perspective and that society should consider those women from earlier times such as Susan B. Anthony as public relations pioneers. Creedon calls for reappraisal of public relations history and mentions that one demographic (white males) are writing a majority of the public relations stories. Scholars Martinelli and Toth conclude that the nature of public relations involves professionals working behind the scenes to promote clients thus their stories are sometimes lost.

Lastly, the research conducted for this essay sought to reveal the significance of women in public relations' history in future narratives. Grollman and Wilson discuss the importance of "seeing yourself," in published articles. Grollman's main theme for his

article is diversity and inclusion. He also discusses a study that reveals constant affirmations that white boys experience from the media through consistent depiction of themselves which subsequently builds confidence as compared to white girls, black girls and black boys. Debrah Wilson further confirms this arguing that “seeing people who look, act, and experience life like them in media and literature makes a person feel included in a society, and it reinforces positive views of themselves and what they can achieve in society” (Ackerman, 2018, para. 6). These perspectives can be applied to the lack of women visible in most public relations history narratives.

### **Conclusion**

There is a deficit of women in public relations history narratives that warrants proactive attention from publishers. The profession has received significant contributions from women that are rarely documented. Public relations today, is mostly comprised of women who deserve more accurate depictions of themselves in the profession’s findings (Russel & Lamme, 2017). To impact change in the history narratives scholars and professors should reappraise history and the standards used to report it as mentioned by Creedon. Professors, scholars and professionals should advocate for accurate accounts of the history of public relations. These narratives would provide motivation for current and future female professionals equipping them with additional motivation to execute and succeed.

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